

Letters & Columns

To our Readers

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MAIL Standard-Examiner
P.O. Box 12790
Ogden, UT 84412-2790

FAX (801) 625-4208

E-MAIL Letters@standard.net

Coming up in the:
Opinion pages

SUNDAY: Our editorials discuss commuter culture and water conservation.

It's time to dispel some environmental myths about wind power

By EDWIN R. STAFFORD,
CATHY L. HARTMAN
and CHRISTINE WATSON

Special to the Standard-Examiner

A proposal to build America's first off-shore wind farm off the coast of Cape Cod, Mass., is sparking nationwide debate about the merits of wind power and the country's energy future.

The proposed 130 wind turbines, spread over 24 square miles of publicly-owned shoal in Nantucket Sound, are expected to bring to the region \$700 million of investment and jobs to build and maintain the facility. Ultimately, the wind farm will supply about 75 percent of Cape Cod's electricity needs without emitting any haze, greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide or mercury. Talk about a win-win for the economy and environment. If only Utah could be so lucky!

Ironically, the wind farm has split the region's residents, with none other than the Kennedys and Walter Cronkite opposing the complex. From his vacation home on Martha's Vineyard, Cronkite is drumming up resistance with radio and TV ads. While many residents claim to be supportive of wind power in principle, they say Nantucket Sound is not the place for it. They fear the blight of windmills, chopped up birds littering the beaches, turbine gear oil leakage into pristine wa-

ters, and obstructions for their sailboats and powerboats.

The media have portrayed the controversy as the well-to-do being more concerned about their million-dollar views and lifestyles than the common good - clean energy and jobs. Nevertheless, opponents have brought attention to a variety of environmental half-truths and misperceptions about wind power. Wind is the world's fastest growing energy source. Given America's Mid-east oil dependency and domestic natural gas shortage, renewable energy development is increasingly urgent.

While Utah has been slow to recognize wind power's economic and environment benefits, several western states, including Wyoming, Texas, Oregon, Washington and California, are seizing the winds of opportunity to help stabilize energy prices and boost rural economies. Opponents' mischaracterizations about wind, however, could retard wind power's momentum in America, and we attempt to set the record straight.

► **Windmills kill birds.** Bird collisions with wind turbines became an issue after exten-



Stafford



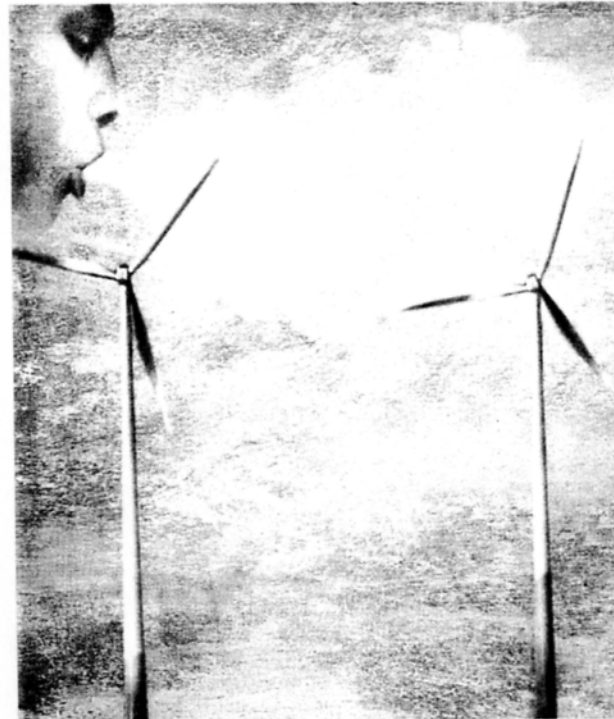
Watson



Hartman

sive wind development in California's Altamont Pass, near San Francisco. The area's significant raptor activity, however, proved to be a site-specific problem, and most studies find that avian mortality from wind turbines is low. Business Week reported recently that windmills cause about 30,000 bird deaths each year. By contrast, bird deaths due to window panes, motor vehicles and cats run into the hundreds of millions annually. Avian studies now help to site windmills to minimize their effect on birds. For one Wyoming wind farm, for example, turbines were deliberately placed back from a mesa's rim after studies showed that raptors tended to fly along it.

► **Windmills leak oil.** One ironic charge against the proposed Cape Cod wind farm is that turbines, if damaged in a storm, would leak gear oil into "pristine" Nantucket Sound waters. Any leaking trace oil, however, would be minimal compared to the fuel residues already left behind from residents' powerboats. Even en-



gines on sailboats excrete fuel. With its summer haze, the Nantucket region is far from pristine. The proposed wind farm would improve the region's environment significantly.

► **Windmills are noisy.** Early turbine designs were noisy, but improved engineering and appropriate setback from nearby residences has made noise less of an issue. Indeed, a wind turbine from 250 me-

ters is no noisier than a kitchen refrigerator. Utahns can hear for themselves by checking out the wind turbine at Camp Williams at the Utah National Guard.

► **Windmills are a visual blight and decrease property values.** Many Cape Cod residents fear that a view of the proposed wind turbines will hurt their property values. Near Lehi, Utah, a similar

charge was made earlier this year regarding proposed wind turbines near a housing development on Traverse Mountain. A recent government-funded study of 25,000 real estate transactions near wind farms, however, found no evidence of decreased real estate values. Opinions vary concerning turbine aesthetics. The ballet motion of windmills, alternating then synchronizing as breezes catch their wings, can be fascinating and hypnotic. For those who find windmills visually objectionable, perhaps they should see them for what they really are - symbols of clean, price-stable, inexhaustible energy that will help America become more energy independent.

If anything, the Cape Cod controversy has people talking about wind power and America's energy future. Utah can be a part of that future by following the paths of Texas and Wyoming, harvesting its own wind resources, and capitalizing on the economic and environmental opportunities of the world's fastest-growing energy source.

Edwin R. Stafford and Cathy L. Hartman teach marketing at Utah State University. Christine Watson is an energy engineer at the Utah Energy Office. Information about Cape Cod's proposed wind project can be obtained from www.capewind.org.